

NEWS BRIEFING

ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARTHUR SYLVESTER

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The Pentagon

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11:20 A. M.

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MR. SYLVESTER: We are having a meeting now and we will shortly be able to tell everybody precisely what we can do in taking newsmen into these areas in the quarantine set up; and I think we will be able to say shortly after that, that we can go ahead and do it.

The organization is set up ready to go. One of the questions which I was asked yesterday and at that time was not prepared to answer, did not want to answer at that time, was about representatives of the foreign press and whether they would be represented. The answer is yes.

I have no announcements to make. I have no material to give out. I'll try to handle any questions.

QUESTION: Can you tell us how many ships have been intercepted in the blockade so far?

MR. SYLVESTER: No, we do not have a list so far.

QUESTION: More ships have been intercepted than you have announced?

MR. SYLVESTER: The only true interceptions in the sense of boarding are the ones we have reported.

QUESTION: How do you distinguish between the interception of the Soviet tanker and any other interception you don't regard as a true interception?

MR. SYLVESTER: We make in on that basis. We do not have a list of everyone that has been seen, passed, hailed. You must remember as I have tried to say again and again there are 2,000 ships every day out there in the Atlantic trade and up and down the coast and obviously there are other methods of knowing about these ships and you can screen out many, many of them by reason of knowing their port, where they are going, etc. We have not kept a list.

QUESTION: You have no reasonable estimate of the number of ships involved?

MR. SYLVESTER: No, I have not.

QUESTION: A reasonable estimate of ships that reached Havana?

MR. SYLVESTER: No, it is possible some have reached there that we don't know about but I have no report.

QUESTION: Do you know, in view of Mr. Khrushchev's letter this morning if the United States is refraining from intercepting Soviet ships?

MR. SYLVESTER: No, if I did, I wouldn't make any comment.

I think yesterday I was asked whether Admiral Ward's staff included officers of other services. I was unable to reply then. I find, since he is at sea and his responsibilities are strictly naval, there are not, of course, Admiral Dennison's staff is a unified command and there are officers of all services and in numbers as there are in all unified commands.

QUESTION: Can you say in terms of what has been announced, what we have in Turkey in the way of missiles?

MR. SYLVESTER: Off hand I can't. I can look back and see what we have announced. I don't carry it in my head.

QUESTION: Can all that be made available today?

MR. SYLVESTER: We can look back and see what we have announced and make that available.

QUESTION: Could that come fairly soon, Arthur, for the benefit of the afternoon newspapers?

MR. SYLVESTER: I would hope so. I doubt if anything will get in the papers but football this afternoon. But I will try to make it available.

QUESTION: Now that the Soviet says it is holding its ships out of the blockade area, can you say that there are no Soviet ships heading for Cuba at this moment?

MR. SYLVESTER: No, we can't say whether they are holding them out or not. We can say only if it goes on hour after hour and day after day and none showed up, then we can say none heading. . .

QUESTION: Do we know of any Soviet ships still heading for Cuba?

MR. SYLVESTER: I wouldn't be in a position to say now whether we do or don't.

QUESTION: Can you say who is present at this meeting that is going on now?

MR. SYLVESTER: Frankly, I can't say. There is no great secret but I haven't got the list. Mr. Splitt and the others know.

QUESTION: Is there any information as to whether the missile construction in Cuba is still going on?

MR. SYLVESTER: Yes, it is.

QUESTION: How late is your information? It certainly is late. We put out the information last night and it is continuing surveillance. There is not the slightest indication it is not going on today.

QUESTION: Is your information subsequent to last night's announcement?

MR. SYLVESTER: I am not prepared to say when it is. But you can be assured my information is current, factual and based on sound ground.

THE PRESS: Thank you.